

loved by many. I know that your family at Sugar Land Baptist Church is lifting you up in prayers and surrounding you with love. Again, the folks from the Twenty Second Congressional District are very sorry for your loss. We lost Phil too soon, and he will be missed.

PRESS CONFERENCE: BERTIE'S RESPECT FOR NATIONAL CEMETERIES ACT

HON. LOU BARLETTA

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 3, 2015

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, our national military cemeteries are hallowed ground.

And I ask my colleagues to agree . . . and support my bill, H.R. 2490, "Bertie's Respect for National Cemeteries Act."

On October 15, 1969, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a man named George Emery Siple shot and killed Bertha Smith, known to everyone as "Bertie."

Siple was convicted of the murder . . . and sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Thirty years later, he died in prison.

Because he was a military veteran, he was buried in Indiantown Gap National Cemetery in 1999.

He was buried there despite a federal law passed in 1997.

That law said that veterans convicted of federal or state capital crimes . . . are not permitted to be buried in Veterans Affairs National Cemeteries or Arlington National Cemetery.

For Bertie Smith's family, this is a heart-wrenching situation that has gone on for three decades.

Jackie Katz—Bertie's daughter—has called it "hell" and a "horror" to live with the fact that George Siple was memorialized and buried with full military honors.

When I first began to look into this issue, it was clear to me that it was as frustrating as it was heartbreaking.

Back in 1997—led by our Pennsylvania Senators—Congress passed a law that said that veterans found guilty of capital crimes could not be buried in our national veterans cemeteries.

At that time, you may remember, the country was still reeling from the Oklahoma City bombing.

And veterans everywhere were justifiably appalled that Timothy McVeigh, a military veteran, could be buried with full military honors.

Now, McVeigh did not receive that burial.

But a major problem we discovered was that the law was not actively enforced for others until 2006.

Since then, the VA has relied on an "honor system," which requires family members to willingly report their relative's criminal record.

In 2013, Congress once again sought to protect our VA National Cemeteries by passing a law to explicitly allow the VA to remove veterans from cemeteries, if they had been convicted of a federal or state capital crime. However, this law does not extend to veterans buried between 1997 and 2013, a time period that includes George Emery Siple.

That's why I've introduced "Bertie's Respect for National Cemeteries Act."

What this law will do is:

Require Veterans Affairs to take every reasonable action to ensure that a veteran is eligible to be buried, including searching public criminal records.

It will clarify Congress's original intent by providing Veterans Affairs the explicit authority . . . to remove veterans convicted of capital crimes that were wrongly buried after 1997.

And it will specifically provide for the removal of George Emery Siple from Indiantown Gap National Cemetery.

This bill really only reaffirms what Congress intended in the first place.

And it enjoys the support of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

There are precedents for the removal of convicted murderers from veterans cemeteries—from Arlington National Cemetery, and VA cemeteries in Michigan, and Oregon . . . to name just a few.

Additionally, nothing in the bill would withdraw previous military honors, such as Purple Hearts or medals for valor, otherwise earned by the deceased veterans.

The discussion of military veterans who have been convicted of murder often raises the issue of mental health treatment and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

There is no question that PTSD is a real condition affecting many service men and women, and I have always stood for funding the evaluation and treatment of those who may be afflicted.

That said, those who have been convicted of capital murder by our judicial system have been declared guilty of the worst offense possible, and any mitigating factors would have been considered at trial and sentencing. And I don't think it's too much to say that murderers should not be buried next to true American heroes.

And the memories of victims like Bertie Smith should not be disregarded. I ask my colleagues for their support in saying that real, true honor really means something in our National Military Cemeteries.

HONORING GREATER GROVE STREET MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 3, 2015

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a pillar of the community, Greater Grove Street Missionary Baptist Church. Greater Grove Street M. B. Church has served as a catalyst for the African American growth in Warren County and the State of Mississippi.

Greater Grove Street Missionary Baptist Church was organized in 1908 in the former home of the late Cosby family on the lower West end of Grove Street. The church was known commonly as "Cato's Church," a name noting the leadership and zeal of its principal deacon at the time. Deacon F. Jackson and family donated the Cornerstone.

Rev. Willie Wood was elected as the first pastor of the church and he served until death. The next pastor, Rev. George S. Lewis, served aptly, with deacons: William Fair, E. Sparkmen and W. Wilson serving faithfully under him.

In 1948, Rev. W.C. Porter was elected pastor; and under his leadership, the following officers served: Sing Robin, Lieutenant Bradley, Charlie Hunt, Jessie Ware, Theodore Shaw, Rufus Britten, James Williams, Rufus Price and Tom Neal.

In 1962, the church came to a major crisis. The City of Vicksburg began widening Grove Street. Grove Street M.B. Church laid in the path of the city's improvements. As a result, the church was torn down. The concrete baptismal pool remains on the old lot, and is the solitary reminder that the church ever existed there. In our hour of need, the Pastor, Rev. E. E. Tutt, and the members of Ebenezer M.B. Church proved to be our friends indeed, as they shared their church building with Grove Street M. B. Church over three years as they struggled to rebuild the church.

West of the old site, a new property on Pierce Street, was selected. On April 27, 1965, at a cost of \$13,000.00, the congregation moved into its newly built tabernacle. First, the old pews from the old church were shed. At a cost of \$600.00, more comfortable pews were purchased from Fisher Funeral Home. In 1972, at a cost of \$2,400.00, the members added 534 square feet of floor space to the rear of the church, which consists of the Fellowship Hall and the kitchen. On June 28, 1975, a chapter of their struggle and movement ended with the death of Rev. W.C. Porter, their pastor through their trials.

Rev. Albert Price succeeded Rev. Porter. Under his leadership, the march resumed for the church. They installed a public address system and added brick veneer to the building at a cost of \$10,000.00. This brief chapter ended in the death of Rev. Price after only serving eleven months as pastor.

In 1977, God blessed the congregation with the energetic leadership of Rev. John L. Brown. Under his leadership, the members were able to free themselves from the mortgage and all indebtedness. In 1979, a new central air unit was installed. However, there was still work to be done. For example, they purchased a Baldwin organ in 1979 to enhance the song service and installed a central cooling system for \$4,056.81; and in 1985, landscaping and drainage work was done which cost \$5,350.00.

In this description of the establishment, struggle, and movement of Grove Street M.B. Church, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit motivated them to have a place set aside for the many souls that were added to the church; and He motivated them to actively seek to grow spiritually and to inspire future generations with the spiritual mission. As Dr. John L. Brown continued to lead and direct the church, it was hoped that Grove Street M.B. Church would continue to grow.

Dr. John L. Brown was a native of Utica, MS. He is a graduate of Alcorn A&M College, in Lorman, MS, where he received his B.S. degree in Elementary Education. He did further study toward his M.S. degree in Elementary Education at Jackson State College, Jackson, Mississippi. He received his Ph.D. degree from McKinley Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS, in 1981. Dr. Brown was a teacher and principal in the Hinds County Public School System, Utica, MS, for twenty years.

As a community leader, he served as an adult leader of the 4-H Club, Mixon Junior High School, Utica, MS, for five years. He served as president of the N.A.A.C.P., Utica,